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Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP

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12 January 2016

Thank you for your letter of 3 December 2015 on behalf of a local advice agency regarding Universal Credit. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Early and continuing contact between claimants and their Work Coaches are key elements of Universal Credit. For claimants who are unfit for work, the focus is on work-related activities that keep them close to the labour market and a move back into work as quickly as their health allows. This approach applies to claimants with a current Statement of Fitness for Work who have not been through the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) process.

This is one of the significant differences between Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance and allows us to minimise the risk of detachment from the labour market. Our Work Coaches have extensive discretion in determining any activities and this includes the scope to set no work-related requirements. Throughout the claim, any requirements are tailored to the claimant's circumstances and capabilities.

We also have safeguards in place. Universal Credit Regulations specify that work search and work availability requirements must not be imposed for the first 14 days of sickness. This applies for the first two episodes of sickness in a rolling 12-month period. While Work Coaches must not require people to be available for or look for work during this first period, they may use their discretion to continue Work Focused Interviews and Work Preparation activities.

Some claimants, for example those undergoing specified treatments or with particular serious conditions, are treated as having Limited Capability for Work, or Limited Capability for Work Related Activity, pending the WCA determination. These people will not be subject to the conditionality outlined above and will usually not be subject to any requirements.

Claimants with a Statement of Fitness for Work are identified for the Work Coach to ensure that appropriate requirements are set in line with their health condition. Work

Coaches should never set requirements that would adversely impact on a claimant's health. Claimants awaiting a WCA determination can be required to attend interviews with their Work Coach and to participate in work-related activities. However, while they present medical evidence indicating they are unfit for work, any work-related requirements are tailored. The Work Coach will not impose work-related requirements on claimants who we cannot reasonably expect to look for or prepare for work and no-one will be required to take part in an activity that they are not capable of performing.

The aim is that reasonable work-related requirements are set according to the individual's health condition. However, if a claimant does not consider the work-related requirements in their claimant commitment are reasonable and reflect their circumstances, they can request a second opinion from a different Work Coach.

Handwritten signature of The Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP, consisting of stylized initials 'ID' and a large 'C'.

The Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS